

**CORPORATE RISHI LEADERSHIP MODEL:  
AN INDIAN MODEL FOR CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT & ETHICAL LEADERSHIP**

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**Abstract**

The paper provides a review of Indian models of leadership, conceptualized and developed by Indian scholars on the basis of conceptual and empirical research. Taking cognizance of these models and the Indian model of Corporate Development, rooted in the ideas of human welfare and ethical profits, author suggests a new model viz. Corporate Rishi Model, wherein Rishi leadership is defined in terms of leader's ability to Re-see the things, events and actions around him or her in new perspectives. As illustrations of this model, author mentions the examples of Narayanmurthy and Premji who are considered by many as 'Corporate Rishis' because of their high standards of ethical leadership.

Keywords: Corporate Rishi, HOPE (Higher Order Purpose of Existence), VEDA (Vision, Enlightenment, Devotion, Action)

The concept of leadership has been an intensive field of study by scholars and practitioners. Academic literature is full of models and metaphors of leadership. During recent years, 'Indian Management' has also emerged as a distinct field of study. An important contribution of 'Indian Management' has been its contribution to enrichment of the leadership concept and leadership models. In every stage of Indian history, India had the distinction of producing some outstanding social and political leaders. These include universally acknowledged personalities such as Buddha, Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. Today in corporate context, do we have some new conceptualization and new role models? With the emergence of world class institutions that India has created, we do find some new role models e.g. Narayanmurthy and Premji, etc. They are the 'Corporate Rishis', hence our model is referred to as Corporate Rishi Model (CRM) of Leadership. To appreciate this idea, in this paper, we present in Part-I, an Indian model of corporate development and in Part-II, we provide the conceptual framework of the Corporate Rishi Model and conclude by providing illustrations of some corporate and academic initiatives in building such leadership for tomorrow.

**Part-I  
Towards an Indian Model of Corporate Development**

Indian model of Corporate Development is rooted in the following Indian ideas:

**Idea # 1: Human Welfare or the Loksangraha**

This idea implies that individual and corporate actions should be driven by the criterion of the overall benefit of the society. It draws our attention towards the social responsibility of the corporates.

*'Sarve bhavantu sukhina, sarve shantu niramaya'* is an ancient *sanskrit sloka* outlining the basic philosophy of life applicable not only at the individual level but also at the corporate level. It implies 'welfare of all' and 'survival of all'. It should be contrasted with the social Darwinism which believes only in the 'survival of the fittest'.

### **Idea # 2: Ethical Profits or the Shubh Labh**

Wealth generation through ethical means or the Dharma driven Artha has been an ideal principle for the conduct of business. Indeed wealth generation has been given positive importance in Indian secular texts and scriptures. The very fact that India was known as Golden bird at one point of time in the world history, indicates that wealth generation had its due importance in the overall scheme of life. The conditionality imposed on the wealth generation was in the form of an ethical principle that wealth generation should be driven by dharma or the ethical ways. Hence, the idea of shubh-labh was developed.

### **Idea # 3: Unattached Action or the Nishkam Karma**

The idea of nishkama karma is unique to Indian thought. Formulated centuries ago, the concept is at the core of leadership concept in corporate context. Detached action without longing for the immediate results is the essence of this concept. Modern leadership literature is coming close to this idea as a fundamental quality of enlightened leaders.

### **Idea # 4: Work as Worship**

The ideal concept of work ethics is inherent in the well-known Indian phrase, 'work is worship'. Hence, the attitude in performing one's task should be in the form of worship. When work is treated as worship it leads to excellence in task performance. Manifestation of this idea can be seen in many fields of art and literature wherein most people ascribe their achievements to their attitude towards work in the form of work as worship.

It may be indicated that the difference between 'work religion' and 'personal religion' should be understood. In the idea of 'work as worship', the 'work religion' gets a priority over the rituals of the personal religions. When personal religion is adjusted to the requirements of work religion, then only proper work ethics develop in an organizing context.

### **Idea # 5: Divinity in Human Beings**

'Every soul is potentially divine' declared Vivekananda. This philosophy is at the core of Indian thought. Vivekananda's idea has also been repeated by many others in one form or other. It also represents the essence of self-development. Similar ideas have now been expressed in the concept of Spiritual Quotient (SQ).

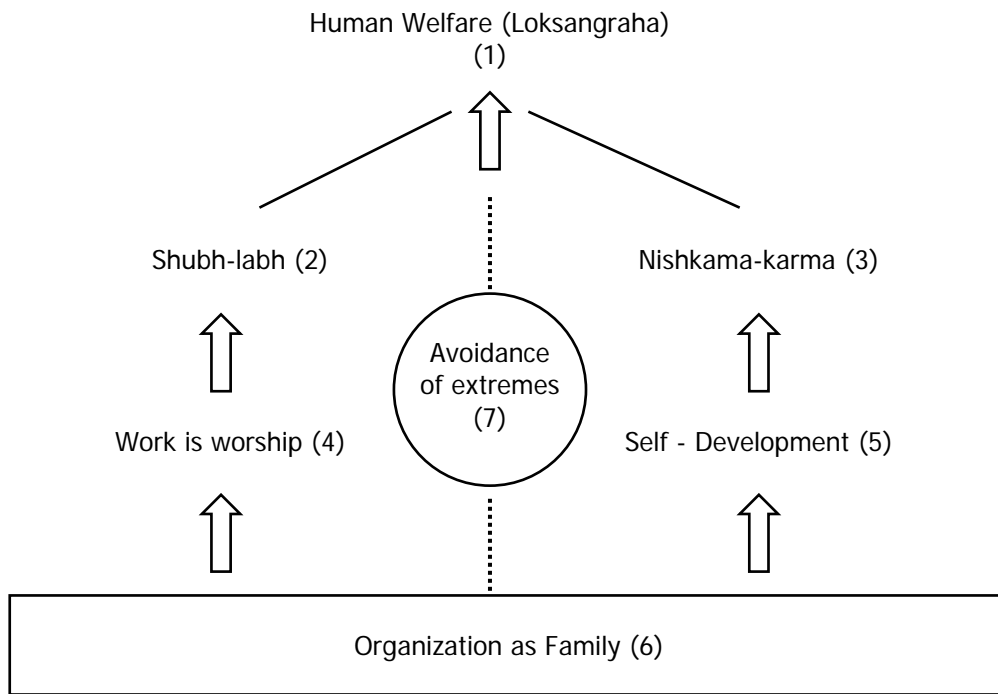
### **Idea # 6: The Concept of Family, Kutumbh**

'Vasudhaiv kutumbkam' – Entire world is one family, is an important message from Indian thought. The idea of kutumbh is unique because each family member has a say in decision making as well as a role to play which changes according to situation and requirements. When organizations are viewed as a family, the joys and sorrows are shared equally and members are part of the 'corporate community'.

### **Idea # 7: Avoidance of Extremes**

Avoidance of the extremes is an idea formulated long time ago. Also popularly known as Buddha's middle path, it implies balancing and steering through the middle or alternative approaches to the extreme solutions. Hence, Indian models seek to evolve new ways rather than being carried away by the 'only way' approaches to problems of humanity.

The above identified ideas form the core values of the Indian thought. When combined together as elements of a conceptual framework, we get an Indian model for Corporate Management and Development. This framework is presented in Fig.1.



**Fig.1: An Indian Model for Corporate Development**

An Indian model of Corporate Excellence should include at least the concepts of human welfare (loksangraha) and the ethical profits (shubh-labh). Other parameters of excellence could be drawn from the known and standard models of corporate excellence.

## Part-II Who Leads The Corporate Development? Corporate Rishi Leadership Model

Punnett and Shenkar (1996) in their *Handbook for International Management Research*, provide a review of research on leadership wherein they have highlighted many Non-Western leadership theories. They provide leadership models from Japan, particularly the PM (Performance - Maintenance) theory of leadership wherein leaders are classified by their focus on Performance function and Maintenance function. They also discuss the Indian model of leadership, particularly the Nurturant Task (NT) leadership model suggested by J.B.P.Sinha (1980).

In a review of "Leadership Styles, Traits, Roles and Practices Down the Ages", Singh & Karunes (2000) also provide a review of leadership models. Their review also includes Indian contributions to leadership literature. The Indian contributions mentioned by Singh & Karunes include Singh and Bhandarkar (1990-1995) model of Transformational leadership in Indian context and Sharma (1995) model of Enlightened Leadership. In fact, several 'models of leadership' have been developed by Indian thinkers and scholars. The following provides a discussion on them:

- 1) **Vijigshu Model of Leadership (Kautilaya):** Vijigshu means Vijaya (victory) ikshuk (desirous). Thus, leader must be desirous of victory. Developed in the context of 'Kingdom Management', model required the king or the leader to be self motivated and driven by 'victory' orientation. Vijigshu uses the persuasion (sam), economic incentive (dam), power division (bhed) and punishment (danda) as instruments to achieve his objective of loksangraha (welfare of the world). In this model, power (danda) is to be used for loksangraha i.e. enlightened collective interest and not for self-interest.
- 2) **Nurturant - Task Leadership Model (Sinha 1980):** According to this model, ideal leader is both nurturant and task oriented. The nurturant dimension of leadership is revealed in leaders taking care of their subordinates, being considerate and affectionate. The nurturance is contingent on task performance. Thus, leader becomes benevolent if the subordinate is task oriented and works hard. It may be indicated that in NT leadership, a paternalistic and parentalistic approach is part of the leadership process which is also found in many Non-Western countries (Punnett & Shenkar, 1996).
- 3) **OCTAPACE Model (Pareek, 1981):** The concept of OCTAPACE was developed for designing OD intervention. According to Pareek, OCTAPACE stands for eight values viz. Openness, Collaboration, Trust, Authenticity, Pro-activity, Autonomy, Confrontation and Experimentation. These eight values also represent the leadership values or leadership attributes. Hence, OCTAPACE model is also a leadership model.
- 4) **Karta Model of Leadership (Singh & Bhandarkar, 1990):** This leadership model views the leader as 'karta' or the head of a joint / extended family. Karta type leaders facilitate workers' participation in management. He / she is available to them for information, guidance and problem solving (p.120). He considers organization as a "big kutumbh" i.e. an extended family. Hence, "instead of scolding, he puts a hand on the shoulder and explains". Thus, we find an echo of Sinha's nurturant task leadership model in the Singh and Bhandarkar's Karta model of leadership.
- 5) **Four Steps Model of Enlightened Leadership (Sharma, 1995):** In this leadership model, four steps have been identified in terms of Robot, Manager, Leader and Enlightened Leader. The following have been identified as the characteristics of an enlightened leader:
  - An enlightened leader harmonizes vision, mission and action through HOPE (Higher Order Purpose of Existence) values and positive management approach.
  - An enlightened leader combines both yang and yin qualities and thereby creates movements and performing organizations through people.
  - An enlightened leader performs effectively in situations characterized by adversity and catastrophe.
  - An enlightened leader responds effectively to radical and sea change situations.
  - An enlightened leader combines both leadership and management metaphorically represented by VEDA (Vision, Enlightenment, Devotion and Action).
- 6) **Yin - Trinity Model of Leadership (Sharma, 1996):** This model is rooted in the concept of yin-trinity represented by the female trinity of Laxmi, Saraswati and Durga symbolizing wealth, knowledge and power. The model implies that the leader should use wealth, knowledge and power positively and for the welfare of the organization and society. With the rise of the women power in the corporate world, this model of leadership may emerge as a future model. The model takes out the male-centricism that is inherent in many models of leadership conceptualized by the practitioners and scholars.

- 7) Mother Leadership Model (Banerjee, 1998):** Mother leadership is a holistic model of leadership. It refers to a 'SELF realized leader with a long term perspective that helps sustainability and promotes values'. The model encompasses all existing leadership styles viz. visionary leader, servant leader, wisdom leader, missionary leader, intuitive leader, value-based ethico-moral leader, proactive leader and authority oriented leader (Banerjee, p.13). In essence, it is an integrative model of leadership based on the metaphor of mother. Hence, it also includes the Nurturant - Task leadership in its formulation. In the era of environmental concerns, this metaphor is definitely an evocative metaphor for the new paradigm in leadership. Gustavsson (1998) considers the idea of 'Mother Leadership' as a new idea that "may help the myopic leadership develop to a leadership of wisdom" (p.viii). It may be indicated that, Rao (1990) had also suggested a 'maternalistic approach to management', wherein he suggested the symbol of 'mother' and its relevance in organizational functioning and work-ethics. Rao provides a systems framework for depicting role of the 'mother' symbol in the context of the work-place. While Rao's effort has been to seek the relevance of 'mother' metaphor in work ethics context, Banerjee takes us beyond the work ethics and suggests it in the leadership context. In leadership context, Banerjee's model is organization-wide, integrative and holistic in nature.
- 8) Workship Model of Leadership (Chatterjee, 1998):** Rooted in the concept of Karmayoga, the workship model of leadership considers, 'work as worship'. Workship "signifies that when work is done in the spirit of worship, the quality of work undergoes a metamorphosis. As a result, even ordinary work is transformed from a mere chore to an extraordinarily reality" (Chatterjee, 1998, p.64). in the workship model of leadership, there are four roadmaps that take the leader towards workship. "These are inner paths leading to the same destination which is the self" (p.69). These paths are (i) Discipline; (ii) Righteousness; (iii) Sacrifice; (iv) Transcendence. In this framework, transcendence is defined as 'a state of realization in action'. Workship creates conditions for effortless effort and the leaders practising workship become the inspirational models. Chatterjee cites the example of Gandhi, Vivekananda and others as the practitioners of the workship model of leadership.
- 9) Wisdom Leadership Model (Chakraborty, 1999):** The model of 'wisdom leadership' as proposed by Chakraborty is rooted in the ancient 'rajrishi' model wherein a leader has a touch of 'rishi' or the touch of sacredness in all his actions. According to Chakraborty, "This line of leadership development has continued unbroken from mythology to history, to the present times; from King Janak to Budha, Ashoka to Chandragupta, ... Vivekananda to Gandhi" (p.79). Chakraborty considers the 'raj-rishi' concept as quintessential Indian model of leadership. To substantiate his argument, he provides empirical evidence in the form of dialogues with leading corporate leaders and he finds many of them practising 'raj-rishi' model in one form or other. Problem with such dialogues is that at times, people in senior positions tend to give socially desirable answers. Hence, many times it is extremely difficult to make firm conclusions about the true nature of leadership. In spite of such limitations, the 'rajrishi' model as a concept is a useful benchmark for leaders. Since, 'rajrishi' is an embodiment of 'wisdom', Chakraborty refers to this model as 'wisdom leadership'. However, the expression wisdom could have different meaning for different individuals. Most illustrations by Chakraborty from history and mythology are male characters. Even the 'wisdom leaders' interviewed are male leaders. Some 'wisdom leaders' are known for their authoritarian approach. However, wisdom is largely a feminine quality, hence, to capture the 'rajrishi' concept through the expression 'wisdom leadership' may not be an exact formulation. Nevertheless, it could be considered a close equivalent. There is a need for a new metaphor that takes us beyond the male-centric, authoritarian 'wisdom leaders'.

- 10) Contribution Model of Leadership (Singh, 2000):** This model considers contribution as core of leading. "Every person is known by his contribution". Based on several "profiles of leading" drawn from the middle management, Anup Singh suggests ten commandments (10 Cs) to energize, motivate and lead, viz. creativity, character, courage, cause, control, competence, communication, care & coaching, creativity and collective management. It may be indicated that "commandments" quite often suffer from internal contradictions e.g. contradiction between 'control' and 'creativity'.
- 11) The 24-hour Leader / Responsible Leadership (Bhatta, 2000):** The idea of 24-hour leader and thereby 24-hour leadership, suggested by Bhatta is rooted in the ancient concept of leader's responsibilities towards his people / followers. A leader 'owns debt to his / her people'. Hence, he pays his entire attention to properly lead his / her people. He / she is responsible to his / her people. He is in 24-hour duty and not merely 9 to 5. He / she is a 24-hour manager and not just a "one minute manager". Kautilaya had worked out 24-hour time table for the King. The idea of 24-hour leader suggested by Bhatta is rooted in this Kautilayan concept. Bhatta provides an 'Ashokan model of leadership' as illustration of 'Responsible Leadership' rooted in the 24-hour model of leadership.
- 12) Rishi as Re-see Model (Sharma, 2001):** This model is rooted in the interpretation of Rishi concept as Re-see concept. A rishi is one, who can re-see the things, events, and actions around him or her in a new perspective in addition to providing a touch of humanness (Sharma, 2001). He / she is also Self Responsible Individual (SRI) and she is Matured - Self Responsible Individual (MS). This model considers knowledge creation in terms of rationality, intuition and revelation in a hierarchical order. Rationality is at the lowest step, intuition is the next step and revelation is the third step. Through re-see approach, leaders use their intuition effectively and thus arrive at new interpretations and revelations that lead to radical changes in the organization and society. Re-see leaders use the radial approach for being always in touch with happenings around them and also for envisioning the future. We can also refer to them as 'full circle leaders', as they see and re-see the environment through full circle radial visioning approach. Sharma also suggests an integrative synthesis of the 'modern prince' and 'modern rishi' for corporate leaders. This integrative embrace combines the yin and yang together, and is therefore holistic in nature.

A summary of the Indian models of leadership is presented in Exhibit - I.

### **Leadership Through Theory K**

Drawing upon the metaphor of organization as a family (Kutumbh), Sharma (1996, 1998) suggested Theory K as a leadership style. This theory integrates the ideas of Theory X, Theory Y and Theory Z and suggests a combination approach. He formulates Theory K as follows:

$$K = X + Y + Z$$

It can be further refined in the following formula,

$$K = X^a Y^b Z^c$$

Wherein, a, b and c indicate the intensity of a particular style. Theory K suggests the following relationship between the three indices, viz.

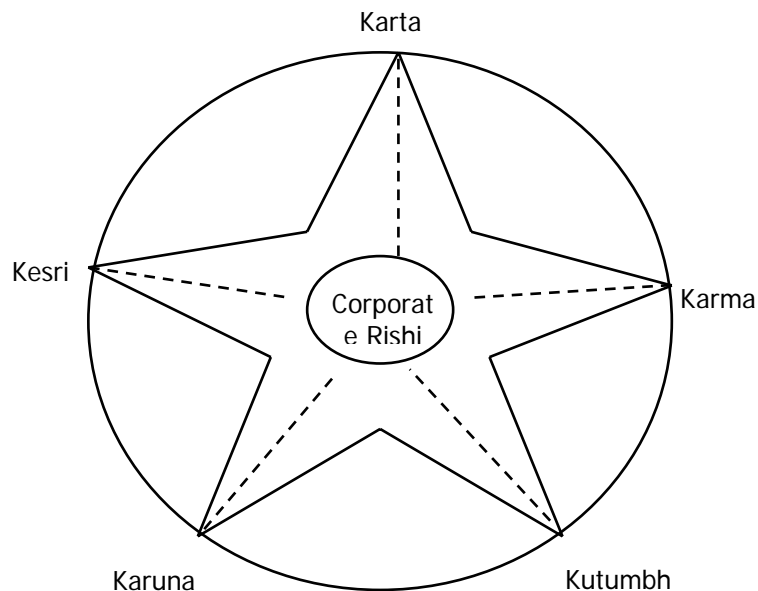
$$a < b < c$$

This implies increasing dosage of theory Y and theory Z.

The concept of Theory K can be further extended where K refers to the following Indian concepts:

1. Karta : Action Performer / Decision Maker
2. Karma : Action
3. Kutumbh : Organization as Family
4. Karuna : Compassion or the Human Touch
5. Kesri : Sacrifice & Self Discipline

This extended version of Theory K integrates several Indian models discussed earlier. In this version, the decision-maker (Karta) performs Karma (Positive action) with a human touch (Karuna) rooted in sacrifice and self-discipline (Kesri), for the welfare of the organization (Kutumbh). We may indicate that the meaning of Karta in our model refers to the person performing an action and not the traditional meaning of Karta of a joint family. Karta simply means decision maker who could be male or female. It may be observed that this 5K model of management is based on a holistic approach wherein the organization is viewed as an extended family. Fig.2 presents this theory in a diagrammatical form.



**Fig.2: 5K Model of Corporate Rishi Leadership**

A Corporate Rishi (male or female) takes care of all the 5Ks. Hence, we can also refer to the Corporate Rishi Model (CRM) of leadership as 5K model of leadership. This model is simultaneously Vijigshu model, Nurturant - Task Model, Yin - Trinity model, an Enlightened leadership model, Workshop model, Mother leadership model, Wisdom leadership model, 24-hour leadership model and Contribution model as it integrates essential elements of these models.

Do we have examples of 'Corporate Rishis?' Can Corporate Rishis be developed? Earlier we mentioned at least two examples viz. Narayanmurthy and Premji as illustrations of the Corporate Rishi model. We also find at least a few recent initiatives in the direction of facilitating the development of such new leadership. Infosys has set up a Leadership Institute at Mysore to build future leaders for Infosys and Infosys like organizations. This is an industry and corporate initiative. In addition, we also have some academic initiatives in this direction.

Women's Institute for Studies in Development Oriented Management (WISDOM) at Banasthali is an initiative in the direction of developing 'Wisdom based Leadership'. WISDOM is based on synthesis of "the spiritual values and scientific achievements of the East and the West". Its learning model is based on 'knowledge-wisdom' cycle represented by 'knowledge - action - reflection - wisdom' and the wisdom equation viz.  $W = R + I$ , wherein W stands for wisdom R for reason and I for Intuition. Wisdom's educational paradigm is rooted in 'Panchmukhi Vikas' i.e. holistic development of an individual through a balance of five aspects viz. physical, practical, aesthetic, moral and intellectual. Indian Institute of Plantation Management (IIPM) at Bangalore represents another initiative in building enlightened leadership for sectoral development. Learning model at IIPM is based on 3D approach, wherein 3Ds are defined as Discussion, Dialogue and Discourse. This is facilitated through 'grounded praxis' to reduce the gap between theory and practice through its 'reach-out' model. Management Centre for Human Values (MCHV) at Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, has been spearheading the task of creating leaders and managers with high skills and high values orientation. Sri Sringeri Institute of Management (SriSIM), Shankara Vidya Kendra, New Delhi, is yet another initiative rooted in time tested principles of values based education as a basis for training management professionals.

While these initiatives are welcome steps, there is a need to strengthen linkages between these initiatives. In addition, to facilitate emergence of 'Corporate Rishis' more such initiatives are required.

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**Exhibit - I**  
**A Summary of Indian Models of Leadership**

<b>Model</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Key concept</b>
Vijigshu	Kautilaya (Ancient times)	Desirous of victory (Vijaya + Ikshuk)
Nurturant Task Leadership	Sinha (1980)	Ideal leader is both nurturing and task oriented
OCTAPACE Model	Pareek (1981)	Eight Leadership values are Openness, Collaboration, Trust, Authenticity, Pro-activity, Autonomy, Confrontation & Experimentation
Karta Model	Singh & Bhandarkar (1990)	Leadership style based on the metaphor of Karta - head of the joint family
Four Steps Enlightened Leadership Model	Sharma (1995)	Enlightened Leader harmonizes vision, mission and action through HOPE - Higher Order Purpose of Existence and VEDA (Vision, Enlightenment, Devotion & Action)
Yin-Trinity Model	Sharma (1996)	Leader combines the qualities of yin-trinity viz. Laxmi, Saraswati and Durga in his / her leadership style
Mother Leadership	Banerjee (1998)	Self-realized leader with a long term perspective that helps sustainability and promotes values
Workshop Model of Leadership	Chatterjee (1998)	Inner pathos to leadership based on (i) Discipline; (ii) Righteousness; (iii) Sacrifice; (iv) Transcendence
Wisdom Model of Leadership	Chakraborty (1999)	Rajrishi framework as a basis of leadership
Contribution Model of Leadership	Anup Singh (2000)	Every person is known by his / her contribution.
24-hour Leadership/ Responsible Leadership	Bhatta (2000)	Leaders is in 24 hours duty and not merely 9 to 5
Rishi as Re-see	Sharma (2001)	Corporate Rishi is Matured and Self Responsible Individual (MS). He / she has ability to re-see things in new perspectives